



LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

Iowa Department of Education

Addressing the Academic Achievement Gap in Iowa

➔ What is it?

The "achievement gap" in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The disparities are often between groups of students defined by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The achievement gap can be observed on a variety of education measures, including standardized test scores, grade point average, dropout rates, and college enrollment.

This is a national education issue. Studies have been conducted on the issue for well over a decade. In addition, state and federal laws require schools, districts, and the state to disaggregate student achievement data by racial and socioeconomic subgroups of students. Each school district is required to publish annual school report cards that communicate to the public data on drop-outs and graduation rates. In addition, each school district is also required to have a district improvement plan that establishes goals directly tied to student needs evidenced by the data.

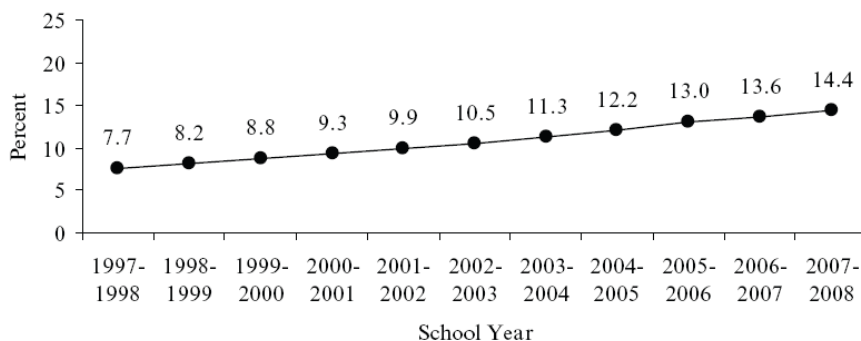
An achievement gap does exist in Iowa. To address the issue, the Iowa Department of Education closely tracks student achievement and suspensions/expulsion data in the state and has developed specifically targeted programs as well as a statewide approach to alleviating barriers that can interfere with student learning.

This includes providing a cohesive system of learning supports, which are strategies, programs, services, and practices implemented to create conditions and environments that promote student learning.

➔ How did it come about?

In 2004, the department worked with national consultants and a national advisory panel and created a stakeholder group and several workgroups to improve student achievement as a whole, including eliminating the achievement gap. The goal of this work was to rethink how student supports are organized and delivered across the state to address barriers to learning. Each student is entitled to receive the supports needed to ensure that he or she has an equal opportunity to learn and to succeed in school.

**IOWA'S PUBLIC AND NONPUBLIC MINORITY ENROLLMENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL K-12 ENROLLMENT
1997-1998 TO 2007-2008**





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From this work came the Iowa design for learning supports, which combine related research and evidence-based practices into six content/programmatic areas:

- Supplements to Instruction: fostering healthy cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development.
- Family Supports and Involvement: promoting and enhancing the involvement of parents and family members in education.
- Community Partnerships: participating with multiple sectors of the community to build linkages and collaborations offering youth development services, opportunities, and supports.
- Safe, Healthy, and Caring Learning Environments: providing environments school-wide that ensure the physical and psychological well-being and safety of all children and youth through positive youth development efforts and proactive planning for management of emergencies, crises, and follow-up.
- Supports for Transitions: enhancing the school's ability to address a variety of transition concerns that confront children, youth, and their families.
- Child/Youth Engagement: providing opportunities for youth to be engaged in and contribute to their communities.

Iowa's area education agencies (AEAs) have designated learning supports teams focused on organizing supports for their agency as well as for local schools and their community partners.

➔ **Where does this initiative currently stand?**

A continuum of learning supports currently exist in schools and communities. Efforts to improve and coordinate these services initially requires that schools dedicate resources and time to changing the way the school system functions. These efforts traditionally have been funded through general budgets and grants. Limited resources are available from the department, the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development, and other organizations in the form of small grants and technical assistance.

In addition to this system-wide approach, several specific initiatives are helping to reduce the achievement gap in Iowa.

It is well documented that teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement. Therefore, the department provides several professional development programs for teachers to address the achievement gap.

- Second Chance Reading is professional development designed to help teachers improve the reading abilities of those middle and high school students who are not reading at grade level.
- "Our Kids" provides professional development resources for school administrators and teachers to meet the needs of English language learners.
- Instructional Decision Making is a process for identifying the specific learning needs of diverse learners and the department provides training on this process. Students identified as needing additional instruction are provided supplemental and core instruction. Students with significant needs are provided intensive instruction in addition to core instruction. Performance is monitored and students flow from one cycle of instruction to another as indicated by the data. In this system, all students receive instruction to address their unique learning needs.



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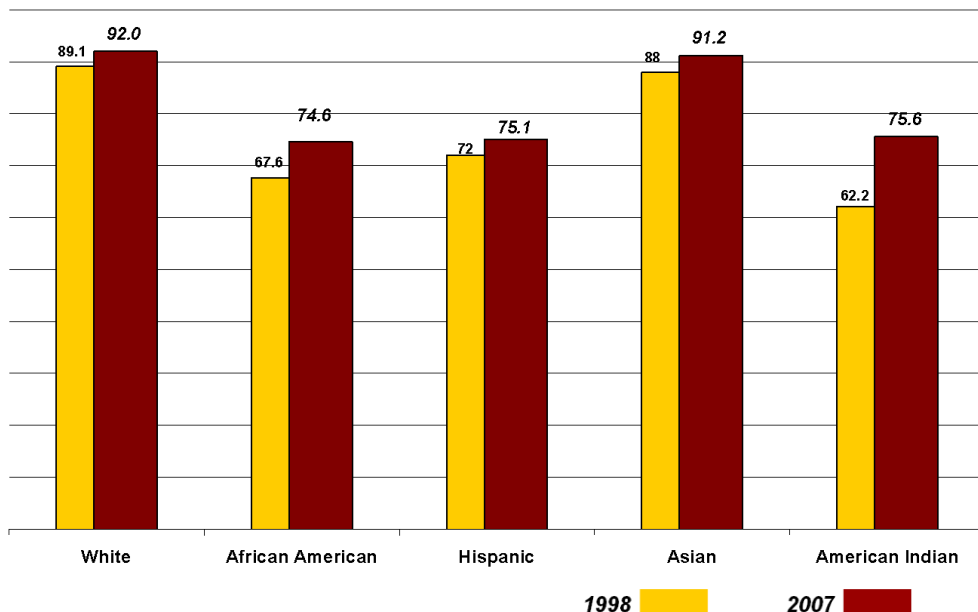
The department is also working with districts and AEAs to help them review and analyze discipline referrals broken down by ethnicity to help school-based Positive Behavior Support teams determine the actions needed at the school level to address disproportionality. The department stresses continuous monitoring of ethnicity data and encourages the implementation of instructional strategies.

The department is creating Iowa Learning Online course components/replacement units for students who are defined as potential or returning dropouts. The units will provide opportunities for students to earn credit for mastering specific skills or concepts they either did not previously master or missed because they did not finish a course in which the core curriculum skills or concepts were addressed. The proposed projects will contribute to the overall reduction in the dropout rate and increase achievement of students. This initiative will provide students with an opportunity to attain missing concepts or skills without having to take an entire course over. Students who have failed entire courses often become discouraged or drop out when they have to repeat entire course or grades.

In addition, state legislation allows a local district to levy modified allowable growth for dropout prevention, providing programs to improve the achievement of all students identified as at-risk/potential dropouts or returning dropouts. Currently 320 districts provide a total of \$101 million, a portion of which comes from local property tax, for dropout prevention.

In May 2008, Iowa's Promise and the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development Destination held a dropout prevention summit. The 17 districts that participated in the summit have each been paired with a liaison from a variety of state agencies and representatives from Iowa State University. These liaisons have been in contact with the districts to talk about progress the teams are making in developing their plans to reduce dropouts and increase graduation rates, particularly for minority students. Liaisons identify successes and barriers and communicate these to the state core team. The goal of the summit is to help Iowa communities develop strategies and action plans that will increase the graduation rate for minority students.

Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity





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→ How has this initiative helped Iowa students?

While the achievement gap still exists in Iowa, many minority groups have seen gains in student performance on the Iowa Testing Programs' statewide tests, as noted in the example charts to the right.

Fourth-grade African-American students have made progress in reading, as have Hispanic students, low-income students, and English language learners.

In addition, 11th-grade African-American students have also made gains in reading. African-American, Hispanic, and low-income students have also made progress in science.

There have also been improvements in graduation rates among minority students.

There is still much work to be done and Iowa continues to steadily work to ensure all Iowa students have an equal opportunity to learn and to succeed in school.

→ Where can I get more information?

Please visit

Learning Supports Initiative:

http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=498&Itemid=1296#GuidingPractices

Second Chance Reading:

http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1205&Itemid=729

Our Kids: http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=420&Itemid=1395

Instructional Decision Making:

http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=801&Itemid=1305

Positive Behavior Supports:

http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=751&Itemid=1622

Achievement Gains

4th Grade *Reading* Percent Proficient ITBS

| | 2001-03 | 2006-08 | |
|------------------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Asian | 75.5% | 80.4% | + 4.9 |
| American Indian | 60.6% | 68.6% | + 8.0 |
| African American | 48.4% | 56.1% | + 7.7 |
| Hispanic | 52.6% | 61.4% | + 8.8 |
| White | 78.6% | 81.9% | + 3.3 |

Achievement Gains

11th Grade *Reading* Percent Proficient

| | 2001-03 | 2006-08 | |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------------|
| Asian | 75.1% | 75.5% | + 0.4% |
| American Indian | 62.5% | 65.7% | + 3.2% |
| African American | 49.7% | 50.1% | + 0.4% |
| Hispanic | 53.5% | 53.8% | + 0.3% |
| White | 78.6% | 79.1% | + 0.5% |